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Analysis in *E Minor*: An Autoethnographic Poetry Collection and Study of
Transgender Identity in Liminal Amsterdam

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Gender and Sexuality Studies | Biochemistry

Europe, Netherlands, Amsterdam

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STUDENT NAME: Em Panetta

SEMESTER/YEAR: Spring 2019

ISP TITLE: Analysis in *E Minor*: An Autoethnographic Poetry Collection and Study of Transgender Identity in Liminal Amsterdam

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ISP ABSTRACT:

This study is an autoethnographic account of the extent to which liminal identity, specifically genderqueerness, are continuously developed in the city of Amsterdam. Transgender identity is a permanently liminal personhood, which is influenced by both potentially liminal periods of time and the liminality of spaces in which the subject lives. At the time of this study, my genderqueerness was situated in the deeply liminal city of Amsterdam for a transient, yet semi-permanent, length of time; thus, this is a study of the temporal and spatial impacts that the Dutch context has had on my personhood. Five locations in the city were identified for their liminal characteristics— threshold-like or in-between states, paradoxical or puzzling functions, sites of transition— and were analyzed for the ways in which the the spaces inform my identity. After completing a series of objective observations, I surveyed my mental and physical responses to the spaces, to form a holistic view of both the places and their effects on me as a genderqueer researcher. The data generated from spatial analysis was then contextualized in a framework of liminality study and transgender identity scholarship, specifically handling language of the monster and the cyborg as strategies for identity expression. Rather than displaying my findings in academic prose, they are found in the autoethnographic poetry collection *E Minor*. Poetry was chosen as the primary analytical tool in order to best make implicit liminality explicit, as well as to capture the emotional component of identity development as it is influenced by compounding liminalities.

IDEAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH:

Looking forward, the work of this collection is far from over. Transgender identity is liminal in any geographical location, and liminalities can be identified almost anywhere. Although these brief months living in Amsterdam were the correct time and place to begin this autoethnographic experiment, my return home to life in Philadelphia does not render the project complete. I plan to continue the work of *E Minor* as a cathartic and academic endeavor, in order to continue tracking my own liminal identity as it is influenced by the varied liminalities around it. My immediate goal is to add a few more positive poems to the collection; while strained and pained narratives are inevitable in this work, especially for myself at this stage in my interpersonal relationships, this collection is not meant to become an archive of suffering. Much of my attention in drafting *E Minor* was spent balancing power and pain, and the future of this collection will continue in that way. There is also room in this thinking to expand beyond the bounds of autoethnography, and to do this work with other transgender people. Interviews and

analysis of others' artistic work brings this project to a larger scale, incorporating the views of others living in liminality, exponentially increasing the extent to which my findings apply to the rest of my community.

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Abstract

This study is an autoethnographic account of the extent to which liminal identity, specifically genderqueerness, are continuously developed in the city of Amsterdam. Transgender identity is a permanently liminal personhood, which is influenced by both potentially liminal periods of time and the liminality of spaces in which the subject lives. At the time of this study, my genderqueerness was situated in the deeply liminal city of Amsterdam for a transient, yet semi-permanent, length of time; thus, this is a study of the temporal and spatial impacts that the Dutch context has had on my personhood. Five locations in the city were identified for their liminal characteristics— threshold-like or in-between states, paradoxical or puzzling functions, sites of transition— and were analyzed for the ways in which the the spaces inform my identity. After completing a series of objective observations, I surveyed my mental and physical responses to the spaces, to form a holistic view of both the places and their effects on me as a genderqueer researcher. The data generated from spatial analysis was then contextualized in a framework of liminality study and transgender identity scholarship, specifically handling language of the monster and the cyborg as strategies for identity expression. Rather than displaying my findings in academic prose, they are found in the autoethnographic poetry collection *E Minor*. Poetry was chosen as the primary analytical tool in order to best make implicit liminality explicit, as well as to capture the emotional component of identity development as it is influenced by compounding liminalities.

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Introduction

During my stay in Amsterdam, I have found three things to be true: (1) the human body can only handle so many frites, (2) the Dutch people— though they may argue a different narrative— are not masters of compromise, and (3) my identity as a genderqueer person is not acknowledged in the Netherlands. As I constantly wipe the residual salt and frite oil from my fingers, it has become clear that discourses involving trans people are pathologized such that transness becomes an affliction to resolve, via medical and psychological intervention, in order to fix a perceived mismatch between identity and body. It is not in the Dutch mindset to consider people who feel at home with in-betweenness, so much so that the terms genderqueer and nonbinary do not exist in their language. Gender in the Netherlands is largely an either/or scenario; if gender is yes or no, then the words both, neither, sometimes, and maybe are nonexistent. Moreover, conversations with my Dutch host mother, her extended family, and other native Amsterdammers with whom I have interacted have revealed them to be reluctant to discuss my identity at all. My correct pronouns, “they” in English and “hen” in Dutch, are met with hostile pushback, ranging from tales of grammatical incorrectness to proclamations that “hen” does not exist as a singular gender neutral pronoun, regardless of the lessons in my Dutch language coursework. Instead of initiating open dialogue, explanation routinely turned to argument, such that the growing tensions have made discussing genderqueerness with my Dutch family an impossibility. My very presence is at direct opposition to one of the greatest Amsterdam virtues; my particular brand of queerness simply cannot doe normaal.

Without the language to properly introduce myself, I am marginalized in the Netherlands in a way that does not occur in the United States. Although nonbinary gender identities are a far

cry from acceptance in an American context, the words exist in common lexicon to sustain a discourse, which is not the case in the Netherlands. Transgender identities are already liminal, as they exist in spheres outside of the cultural binary. Yet, without the terms to articulate one's existence, transness in Amsterdam is extra-liminal, beyond that of queerness itself.

Culture, regardless of country of origin, exists in congruence with the space it occupies. In addition to personhood, spaces can be liminal, such that those living within them internalize this feeling. Amsterdam as a city is a deeply liminal space, which is striking to the non-native observer. The semi-circle structure of the streets disrupt the common gridlike pattern, causing distance to dissolve as a two-block navigation mistake becomes a thirty-minute detour. Cut with canals, Amsterdam's streets are simultaneously truncated and doubled, as the water seems to determine the placement of paved roads while also creating new and different avenues of movement.. Features of Amsterdam are characteristically liminal, as the mundane becomes complex in its self-contradictions and ambiguity. A desire for normalcy— once again, doe normaal— is built into the city at its very basic parts, yet liminality flows within as a second canal system.

Amsterdam as a liminal location thus compounds liminality and monstrosity of genderqueerness, pushing identity making in this place to a doubly liminal end. However, when living in a foundationally liminal place such as Amsterdam, the subject and the spatial begin to intertwine. Prolonged liminal states generate their own inner structures, becoming hyper-realities in which opposition to a “normal” reality is at the core, while feelings of distortion, ambiguity, and liminality are present; the structures that form within a subject's liminal neo-reality are at play with those that arise from their spatial surroundings. When a language falls short to

articulate liminal experience, new lexicon is formed. These words become physically centered in location and time, liminality building within liminality, creating a distinct version of the genderqueer person that cannot exist quite in the same way outside of Amsterdam.

This paper, therefore, is an act of resistance. It is an exercise in self discovery, both in its content and delivery, in order to investigate the extent to which compounding liminalities of space, time, and personhood influence the continuous development of my transgender identity in Amsterdam. For many, a lack of categorical thinking or clear lines of logic is an uncomfortable space to inhabit. Cognitive uncertainty is generally used only as a means to reach a definitive answer, ultimately exiting the uncomfortable, uncertain space. I aim to probe at the discomfort in liminality, to find how identity is reconciled in spaces and communities that are unwilling— or unable— to conceptualize paradoxes, thresholds, middles, and unknowns. This is an autoethnographic study of liminal identity in Amsterdam, informed by literature on liminality and othering schemes, ultimately presented in the form of poetry. I have chosen to articulate my findings in poetry, as this is the medium that lends itself best to questioning, emotional portrayal, and linguistic play. While I am my primary research subject, liminal spaces in Amsterdam serve as a grounding tool through which I consider their impact of location and time on my identity development and presentation as a genderqueer person. These locations are places I frequent in daily living while in Amsterdam, thus, they are largely unremarkable. Herein lies their importance: the mundane but consistent presence of everyday location must have an impact on one's continuous identity development. Using the the framework I build from literature on liminality studies, transgender experience, and monster/cyborg theory, I analyze these spaces, reflect on my experiences and emotions there, and create a poetic product through which my data

is displayed. Resonating strongly with terminology of inbetweens and thresholds, I find power in my compounding liminalities, creating a language of difference that serves as both a unifying force for others in socially anomalous positions and a glimpse into our liminalities for those who are not.

Review of Literature

Reconstructing Transgender Identity: Language of Liminality, Monster, and Cyborg

Quite literally written out of the queer conversation, nonbinary and genderqueer people living in Amsterdam remain just outside the realm of tolerance, as the Dutch language has no words to describe their orientation. Without the vocabulary to describe one's existence, a lexicon of otherness takes hold as the primary identity-making tool. Images of inhuman cyborg and monster are already popular methods of self-description for nonbinary and other transgender folks, but these othering models are exacerbated when no other words are available to describe this particular transgender social situation. The liminal experiences of a transgender subject are compounded by the ambiguous, liminal nature of their spatial surroundings. Such prolonged, compounding liminalities begin to form internal structures, normals, or hyper-realities that are at odds with a perceived cultural norm. Therefore, the identities of transgender people living in the city of Amsterdam are contingent upon the monstrous and structured liminal-normalcy of this unique experience.

Transgender, in this context, refers all non-cisgender identifying people. Although popular thought most often reduces the term to refer only to those seeking medical transition—a pathologized shift from the gender assigned at birth to the “other”—there are a host of

nonbinary and genderqueer identities that exist as well, completely separate from the gender binary. Rather than visualizing gender as a spectrum, wherein masculinity and femininity are fundamentally opposed and sit opposite one another, gender is best described as a mobius strip; without beginning or end, the one-sided figure retains the “flow” and in-between of a spectrum and discards the binary that a two-sided spectrum retains. Therefore, a transgender, nonbinary, or genderqueer identity exists anywhere on this mobius strip, given that this identity somehow differs from the gender assigned at birth. Thus, including and celebrating nonbinary/genderqueer folks is intrinsic to the term transgender.

Inherent in transness is also a sense of in betweenness, neither here nor there, occupying a liminal space outside the bounds of cisgender hegemony. Liminal experiences can be described categorically, calling upon the creation and recreation of normalcy during states of ambiguity, which places them in direct opposition to a cultural normal. Subject, temporal, and spatial, three basic dimensions that act as liminal experience origins, and may vary based on the “scale,” the intensity or degree, of liminality¹. In this sense, the liminal is so large that it is practically undefinable, potentially occupying any stretch of space, time, and personhood. Temporal liminal processes that are extended over long periods overtake cultural structure, or hegemonic realities— which are primary identity forming actors— such that long, temporal liminality causes a subject to experience a more intense scale of liminality as well. Further, this exchange between temporal and subject liminality may exist in a liminal space, compounding the degree and influence of the liminal experience, such that all three may be exerting pressure on a single subject in congruence. This interplay of liminalities and inflated scale of liminal experience

¹ Bjørn Thomassen, “The Uses and Meanings of Liminality,” *International Political Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (2009): 23.

influences identity, most clearly in the relationship between the liminal subject and their surrounding culture. Since liminality exists “within a society where much of what goes on stays ‘normal,’” an opposition between liminality and normalcy is created such that “the degree [of liminality] depends on the extent to which the liminal experience can be weighed against persisting structures.”² Weighed against one another, the normal and the liminal seem mutually exclusive, and normalcy or structure are only reformed if a liminal experience is prolonged. When its scale becomes so intense that it becomes a permanent state, rather than transient, liminality itself becomes a “hyper-reality” in which structure forms³. The ambiguous, disoriented nature of liminality lends itself to reality creation, which contains its own structure that produces a unique normal. This prolonged liminal-normal is exclusive to those who experience it, causing it to have profound effects on identity creation.

Whether prolonged or transient, liminality impacts identity development most profoundly through reconstruction. Sonny Nordmarken’s autoethnographic remarks reveal that the influence of liminal identity as a transmasculine person on the self is neither ahistorical nor decontextual, as “liminality exists because there is a non-liminal normal next to it,” and constant reconstruction of social being is always occurring both in the liminal spaces the self occupies/sustains and in the context of a broader cultural hegemony⁴. Liminality cannot exist without a contextual location, juxtaposed against a non-liminal normal; thus, reconstructive identity development is work occurring among and regenerated by a sustained, external normal, regardless of the structures that are created inside liminality itself. The hallmark of liminality is the absence of ‘before’ and

² Thomassen.

³ Thomassen.

⁴ Sonny Nordmarken, “Becoming Ever More Monstrous: Feeling Transgender In-Betweenness,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 37–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800413508531>.

‘after’ states. This ambiguity initiates a process of reconstruction for the subject, to instigate a process “well fitted to expanding our understanding of self-identity/social-social identity mutual construction.”⁵ The absence of clear starts and ends leaves a liminal subject, location, or time unbounded to an agenda for identity development, instead leaving the process free to fester in ambiguity while new liminal-normal structures form. While a temporarily liminal reconstructive process can also be sequestered within a particular life phase, beginning with an initial trigger and ending with a new formation of self, lifelong liminality of a trans experience is best described as ongoing ambiguity within an unstable social context⁶.

Categorized as intense in-betweenness within a binary society, transgender identities themselves are liminal states of personhood, and are therefore perpetual states of reconstructed liminal-normal for the trans person, who otherwise exists in a state of cultural abnormality. It is an identity category that is rooted in discrepancy— both between the corporeal form and the self, as well as between society and the self— whilst sustaining a sense of oneness with ambiguity. As a self-identified transsexual, Susan Stryker likens herself to Frankenstein’s monster, posing her own identity in direct opposition to Nature: “transsexual embodiment, like the embodiment of the monster, places its subject in an unassimilable, antagonistic, queer relationship to a Nature in which it must nevertheless exist.”⁷ Nature refers to the hegemonic normal, the white, cisgender, and heteronormative person that society is poised to produce. Therefore, the existence of people who defy this supposedly innate Nature find themselves antagonistically opposed to it.

⁵ Nic Beech, “Liminality and the Practices of Identity Reconstruction,” *Human Relations* 64, no. 2 (September 23, 2010): 285–302, <https://doi-org.muhlenberg.idm.oclc.org/10.1177%2F0018726710371235>.

⁶ Beech.

⁷ Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Stryker and Whittle (London: Routledge, 2006), 244–56, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-3-237>.

Monstrosity, then, takes hold as a neo-normal structure within liminality; queered relationships with a gendered normal are intrinsically liminal, and monstrous language is particularly useful to capture this state of an other that is a foil to Nature itself. Monsters themselves are direct products of culture, “difference made flesh, come to dwell among us... rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate from Within.”⁸ Located outside this Within this gendered Nature or normal, ontologically liminal, monsters embody difference and are described with a rhetoric of deviance, abjection as a product of fear⁹. Threatening in its ability to shift, in physical form and identity, the liminal monster is a “form between forms.”¹⁰ Creaturely beings that reconstruct identity in liminal spaces counter normal, become “what often gets read as unhealthy and pathological acts and affects;” monster dwells among common men in its own liminality, provoking and reproducing fear.¹¹ Stryker therefore is able to articulate her place in culture as the state of a monster, articulating the opposition between her liminal state of personhood and the cultural normal from which she originates.

This sense of self-reflection, finding solidarity in polymorphous, monstrous being, exceeding normal human personhood as a trans individual is as easily embodied in the cyborg as it is in the monster. Explaining bodies through dualisms in technological language takes a step beyond a monster’s flesh, in order to explore identity development in disembodied machine.¹² Haraway finds a “cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous

⁸ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), 3–25.

⁹ Cohen.

¹⁰ Cohen.

¹¹ Carina Pasquesi, “Of Monsters, Creatures and Other Queer Becomings,” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 46/47, no. 2/1 (2013): 119–25.

¹² Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminist in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women in the Reinvention of Nature* (Free Association, 1991), 3–90, <http://www.jstor.org/muhlenberg.idm.oclc.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt1b7x5f6.4Copy>.

possibilities” describing it as “as kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self.”¹³ Bio-technological hybridization, though perpetuating language of illegitimacy and perhaps even causing personhood to become inert, is nonetheless useful in visualizing a kinship with liminal and contradictory identity markers. Sitting in this transgressed state, the body conceptualized as a sacred space becomes nothing more than a coded structure onto which cultural politics are prescribed. A monstrous body produced by and threatening culture is also a cyborg myth, sitting at the “bottom of a cascade of negative identities” that is an almost antagonistic mixture of biological, mechanical, and philosophical¹⁴. Language of embodiment, whether cyborg or monster, is at the crux of these reconciliations of liminal identity and culture. Fear, othering, monstrosity, and reconstruction constitute a monstrous, cyborg lexicon used to articulate the bounds of difference, in order to articulate compounding liminalities of the transgender subject, their lifetime, and their spatial location.

Language thus is an essential tool for identity development, as monstrous and cyborg experiences lend themselves to articulating the particular liminal situation between self and a gendered normal, which is compounded in expanses of liminal time and space. Stryker notes phallogocentric language as the violent tool through which a culture ostracizes the genderqueer population. She mobilizes a lingual resistance, citing that, “the monster accomplishes this resistance by mastering language in order to claim a position as a speaking subject and enact verbally the very subjectivity denied it.”¹⁵ Cyborg politics, too, wage a counter attack on such phallogocentrism, as such politics are “the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect

¹³ Haraway.

¹⁴ Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)”; Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminist in the Late Twentieth Century.”

¹⁵ Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage.”

communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism.”¹⁶ Personhood restricted to a presence or absence of the phallus is a tangible piece of the cultural normal that perpetuates outsides and in-betweens for identities that are not so neatly organized; phallogocentrism is by and large the tool that sustains the “normal” against which trans liminality is positioned. Monstrosity and cyborg reality in and of themselves are identity-making tools within a liminal reality, creating a counter-narrative to dominant culture in efforts to reconstruct a self. The daily microaggressions of incorrect or nonexistent language instigate such a resistance, as the very act of creating an identity in a culture that claims its non-existence is revolutionary.

Autoethnographic Poetry: The Means to an Unarticulated End

“Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought” — Audre Lorde, Poetry Is Not a Luxury

To articulate an identity situated within liminality requires a mastery of language, giving vocabulary to experience and emotional response, and remaining open to such awareness. Knowledge production is — despite the greatest efforts by the best researchers— a subjective art, with the self infused to some degree in each shared finding; there is no empirical truth, simply different renderings of solutions. It is thus naive to believe that a study of anything as subjective as identity development could be distilled to objective findings, especially when influenced by liminal spaces, times, and subjects. Whereas standard academic writing may distill personhood from scholarly findings, studying continued identity development in a liminal context has a potent emotional element that, if omitted, would render the research incomplete; this is cause for using a different form of data collection and sharing. Through poetry, a

¹⁶ Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminist in the Late Twentieth Century.”

researcher's awareness of their own positionality explodes into a deliberate introspective stance "because poetry involves gaining strength through the unconscious...the place where the repressed manage to survive," and in so doing, the data retains the personhood of its subject¹⁷. Therefore, poetry is the best-fit expression for an autoethnographic approach to researching transness as a liminal identity, fixed in liminal spaces, during a liminal time period.

An erotic endeavor, poetry writing is a form of academic expression that relies on the power of self-negotiation within the research environment. Poetry is a means through which emotion becomes analyzable data, such that the very act of engaging with feeling in knowledge production is provocative and sometimes taboo. This is not to argue that opinion and fact are one in the same, rather, it is to identify that the research process and the researcher's response to their work are intrinsically linked, yet this connection is rarely brought to the forefront of the standard academic conversation. The eroticism of poetry opens the door for such conversation, "for the erotic is not a question of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we feel in the doing."¹⁸ Considering the erotic as a source for information, the breadth of personality with which it is infused with experience is a vital component of data that conventional academic prose simply cannot convey; thus, poetry is the means to an often unarticulated end¹⁹. A poetically expressed autoethnography considers the particular spatial and temporal situation of its author in order to find a more nuanced understanding of a culture, but does so by handling the erotic and emotional deliberately, plainly, and honestly.

¹⁷ Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 875–93.

¹⁸ Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic As Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 53–59.

¹⁹ Lorde.

Poetry, in addition to its academic advantages for autoethnographic work, is a liminal site of language play. It has enough structure to be recognizable— it is more than an unintelligible stream of consciousness— yet is not bound to the commonplace regulations of prose. Poetry sits between nothing (unrelated words and images) and something (defined sentences marked with grammatical convention). It is a form between forms, a creation site, “for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless.”²⁰ While in between forms itself, poetry is a form-giving expression of ideas. It sits at the threshold of known and learning, allowing new information to be processed through vocabulary, such that words and images give form to the data, even though the poetry may be without pattern or form itself. Moreover, poetry is erotic, intimidating, and largely avoided by those who consider themselves non-artistic; liminally speaking, poetry is the fear-provoking monster under the literary bed. As structure, or form, is created in the monstrous, liminal site of poetry, it is a logical tool for use in analyzing liminal identity.

Steeped in liminality itself, poetry is a well-suited vehicle through which liminal experience can be analyzed. Considering liminal spatial and temporal influences, more permanently liminal states of personhood can be examined, in order to find the ways in which intersecting inbetweens influence identity. As the subject of this autoethnographic study, my personhood as a genderqueer person temporarily living in Amsterdam is my general poetic theme. I continuously craft together pieces of my identity that are perched between existence and oblivion, so I “write without the founding myth of original wholeness” to construct a narrative of liminality using liminal expression itself²¹. In doing so, I gather knowledge and experience to

²⁰ Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 36–39.

²¹ Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminist in the Late Twentieth Century.”

forge a path into the parts of myself that require building with language, such that poems are not the product but the process²². Discourse involving trans bodies most often seems to be about just that: bodies. I, however, research while I occupy my trans body. Situate my trans body in places that may not expect or welcome trans bodies. Write using the hands of my trans body. Speak using the tongue of my trans body. My body and its location are my laboratory, my experience is my muse, and my words are my data.

Methodology and Source Material

Liminal Spatial Analysis

Primary source material was gathered through spatial analysis of locations found to be liminal in Amsterdam. Liminal locations are spaces that can be described as in transition, either literally changing forms or are sites of transition/movement for the people that exist within it. Amsterdam Centraal Station, the construction occurring near Spaarndammerdijk, Westerpark, and local grocery stores such as Albert Heijn were considered in this sense, as the populations in these places are in constant flux. There is a sense of normalcy for these places, being remembered for the everyday tasks they house rather than being noticed as spaces. The stagnant and calm presence of the physical buildings— or beach, as it is at the Westerpark construction on the IJ— as well as the mundane anonymity of existing cultivates a certain liminality that served as a basis for this work. I was able to evaluate my presence as person with liminal identity as I exist in Amsterdam on the everyday scale by investigating everyday places in a prolonged period

²² Sarah Kay, *If I Should Have a Daughter ...*, vol. TED Video, TED2011, 2011, https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_kay_if_i_should_have_a_daughter.

of transition, either through the physical construction of the space or the people inside it, juxtaposed with pieces of permanence.

Spaces are also liminal when characterized as cognitive thresholds or inbetweens; paradoxical or strange dual-functional; or provoking isolation, anonymity, or loneliness, even in situations when the physical location may be considerably populated. Cafe Brecht, located at Weteringschans 157, as well as Vondelpark and several of Amsterdam's famed canals served as the places in which these types of liminalities were investigated. These locations have been sources of comfort while I lived in Amsterdam, such that my experience as a trans person feels safe or normal; a rather odd occurrence, as being genderqueer in the Netherlands is not a particularly mainstream or accepted endeavor. Since liminalities may compound on each other, the character of these spaces seems to positively influence my liminal personhood, which served as the foundation for my thinking and creative process.

Analysis of these spaces was first sensory-based, through which information based on the five senses will serve as both a grounding technique for connecting with the space and as an entrance into an observational mindset. A second round of observation was completed to note my emotional response to spending time in the space, the relationship between the place and my life in Amsterdam, and any initial thoughts I have on the impact the particular space may have had on my identity formation. Analysis and reflection upon these observations was completed using the framework provided by the review of literature, wherein themes of liminality, monstrosity, and the cyborg were addressed in terms of identity making in a cultural context. Intersections of liminal spaces, subjects, and expanses of time were considered in conversation with the particular observations of the liminal locations in Amsterdam. Data and analysis is

reported in a collection of free verse and spoken word poetry. This method of knowledge production reports findings from the spacial studies together with personal and emotional input to create a holistic review of identity making in Amsterdam. Poetry serves as a reflection, both objectively and personally, on mundane and overlooked parts of life in this city such that mental states and sensory information can be expressed as vividly as possible. The final step of analysis was a meta-analysis of the poetic work, wherein the intentional and unintentional choices of language and image will be examined for their implications using the theoretical framework of liminality, in order to extrapolate additional understanding of transgender identity development in a liminal context.

Assumptions and Positionality

This autoethnography is as much self-discovery as it is scholarly knowledge production, so there is inherent bias in my investment as the liminal subject. Since I have only used my own interpretations of the spaces, checking in with my personal, emotional responses, my own experience was a large part of the data on which I plan to write. To manage this, I used the dual approach in my spatial analyses first reading each place as objectively as possible, then completing a personal reflection on existing in the place. Of course, being descriptive rather than evaluative, and suspending judgement is impossible to do without remaining a bit subjective as the researcher. But, being conscious of biases and using advisors/peers who are not nearly as emotionally invested I was in the work as impartial third-parties during my data collection process helped to mediate the problem as much as possible.

In a similar vein, the autoethnographic nature of this project was an undertaking completely of my own, and I do not write as a spokesperson for any transgender, genderqueer, or

nonbinary person living in Amsterdam. I have read spaces and written my poetry using images, experiences, and memories— both positive and negative— that are unique to my history and reflect only my continued identity development. My liminal situation is threefold: I have lived in Amsterdam for a transient timeframe (too long for the typical tourist, but too short to establish permanent roots) while I exist among liminal locations in this city, and I do so as a trans person. Thus, my dual situation as the researcher and as the primary subject has placed this work into an academic commonplace as a singular account of location and experience, in order to discuss the social circumstances of trans people in Amsterdam.

Poetry Collection: *E Minor*

Foreword

E Minor is a collection informed by spatial analysis and personal reflection. It is designed to serve as an introspective experiment for my own identity development while I live as a genderqueer person in Amsterdam, though it is equally telling of the slightly disorienting, threshold-like experience of transness on a larger scale. *E Minor* opens with “Forty-Five Minutes,” a spoken word poem describing the liminal experience of visiting a grocery store. A motif of emptiness is present throughout the opening, describing a particular Elsewhere that accompanies the speaker on their errand. Elsewhere, in this sense, is meant to embody the sense of vacancy and aloneness present in a grocery store, as patrons anonymously complete their task and largely ignore everyone else around them. Although they notice others, the majority of shoppers remain independent, giving the supermarket— old favorites ever-present on the shelves, but a constantly changing population moving between them— an eerily liminal feel.

Further in the poem, the speaker begins to anxiously spiral, questioning their place within anonymity. It is meant to evoke a dissociative panic, wherein the speaker is internally tackling large philosophical questions but doing so in a stoic public place. At the poem's close, forty-five minutes have passed, both in the speaker's mental reality (early Tuesday morning) and in the physical reality of the supermarket patrons (Friday afternoon). This shift in time is a product of losing track of oneself in intense thought, so much so that the days seem to split entirely.

Although gender is not specifically the focus of this poem, "Forty Five Minutes" serves as an introduction to liminal experience, rocketing the speaker out of the now and back again, while considering their individuality in the context of an anonymous population.

"Under My Collar" follows as a secondary introduction, this time to the speaker themselves, backlit by the theme of liminality. At this stage, it is unclear if the speaker is a person at all; anonymity has now transferred from an external population to the speaker themselves. The poem is structured to establish boundaries between speaker and audience, with phrases such as "Your tongue cannot curl/around my edges" used to create this distance. Cafe language, wherein the speaker identifies with the building more than its purpose or products, is a nod to eclectic atmosphere of Cafe Brecht. In analyzing this space, I found that my excentricities resonate with the mood of the place rather than the contents of its menu. This kinship grew into a series of images meant to describe being transgender as an experience of not quites; the reader is almost able to interact with the speaker in a sensory way, yet the speaker quickly flips the scene such that they are no longer accessible, separated by their liminality. The closing stanza is heavily influenced by cyborg language, referencing binary code, Young's double slit experiment and quantum physics, and calculus. These concepts, more niche than the rest of the poem, appear at

the close to deeper exemplify the fundamental difference between speaker and reader. The speaker establishes their liminality through difference, calling on the boundaries between them and their audience as a means to distinguish between themselves and the “normal” standards their existence seems to break.

E Minor then moves forward to a journal entry-like spoken word poem entitled “Ode To My Dyke Hair,” wherein the speaker confronts their judgemental grandmother. Rejecting the seemingly conditional love of their family, the speaker finds pride in their appearance, growing from a submissive nod to commanding the attention of the grandmother and the audience. The speaker uses a jaded sense of humor to identify senseless small-mindedness of their family, commenting on their grandmother’s limited world view, while also taking a moment to giggle at themselves, sharing casual asides with the reader as the narrative unfolds. This poem is largely a product of temporal liminality, as my stay in Amsterdam is both the longest burst of tourism and the shortest lifetime, a strange sense of temporary permanence during which I reflect on new relationships and those I left behind. Inspired by my own conversations, both with my true family and with my temporary home in Amsterdam, “Ode To My Dyke Hair” is a reflection on the lingering bigotry I see in loved ones to whom I am still closeted. It is an exercise in strength that I hope to grow into, such that the words someday lift from the page and exit my mouth.

“Socialist Retail Therapy” follows as a product of observations made in Centraal Station. The first half follows the socialist on their daily commute, narrating an internal struggle between giving into a selfish desire and staying true to their moral standards. In this case, it is a question of ethical consumption, a small window into the difference between theorizing on a subject and incorporating theory into practice. The socialist is unable to strike a deal between the two,

ultimately buying the “sweatshop sweatpants.” Later, they regret the choice and use alcohol as a coping tool, which buries them deeper in remorse, though this is thinly veiled as a gesture of self care. Commuters in Centraal Station, locals from the city and tourists alike, often carry shopping bags of some sort as they travel, and these added items intensify the transient nature of the space, as both goods and people travel through it, but the structure remains. Liminalities already compound in the station, as the constant flux of travelers paired with the stagnance of shops and restaurants creates a paradoxical space of motion and stillness. This liminal building phenomenon is magnified as travelers move with their new purchases, existing in the threshold of ownership and patron. The closing line, “And I’m just trying to cross the street,” is thus layered as well: while it is literally difficult to cross the busy streets and halls of Centraal Station, the socialist is also still attempting to navigate between the theory they believe and the reality in which they live. Until this line, the speaker has functioned as an unacting narrator, but they insert themselves as an “I” in the last line, indicating that they too are experiencing an inner turmoil, like the socialist subject. In this way, the socialist’s crisis becomes a metaphor for the speaker’s own questioning, as they negotiate between the liminality of the space they inhabit, the liminal in-between they witness in the socialist, and their own threshold-like liminality—negotiating between the sidewalk and street, the speaker stands on the curb.

The speaker pauses for a moment of humor in “People Watching” to reflect on the absurdity of vests as outerwear. The reader is directly addressed with questions, as if the speaker is genuinely deciding on their next vest purchase immediately after their socialist soapbox in the poem prior. Originally observed in Vondelpark, then traced throughout the other analyzed spaces, vests hold subtle popularity with the people of Amsterdam. They reflect Dutch weather’s

perpetual state of unrest; between a coat and a shirt, a vest is neither fully waterproof nor insulating, yet still exists as a viable accessory in the midst of changing weather. Peppered between the speaker's joking vest commentary is a broader philosophical discussion of belonging: "homogenized individualism/locked away from us" and "reminder of being alive—/sometimes others are too" reach farther than fashion statements. As the speaker observes the phenomenon of the vest, they wrestle with the pressure to conform to a public identity that is not their own. Although "People Watching" concludes with a question, it is clear that the speaker has already made their decision.

Just over halfway through *E Minor*, "Honesty" is a short pause to speak on autoethnography itself. Separate images flash in quick succession to describe the emotional toll that this work had taken on me as a writer. This poem is a memory of a mission statement, meant to reminisce about building strength in the midst of discomfort. Like most other poems in the collection, "Honesty" does not discuss gender concretely, rather, it encapsulates thought in motion that can be used to describe liminal gender identity. Most images in this poem are transient or a between state— lava in the midst of cooling, illegitimate children, a smolder— in order to bring liminality to the forefront of understanding before moving forward in the collection. The poem is centered around a backwards "honest" and closes with their memoir's misspellings, as the speaker is set on enduring and expressing the emotional labor that growth requires, particularly in this project of knowledge production. Though the shortest poem in the collection, this poem is the most honest, offering the most candid and vulnerable view into my research/creative process. Transgender experience is as feral as it is honest, a constant negotiation between self preservation and ignorant bliss.

This poetic, emotional labor is followed by “The Hangover,” a recognition of the arduous journey the reader and the speaker have been taking together. This poem is split into two parts: the hangover itself and the push further that follows. The first part follows a natural decay, as the forest witnesses and participates in the speaker’s decomposition. Dickinson-like nature metaphor permeates this section in order to infuse the breakdown with a sense of inevitable calmness, as the speaker exits the poem after only the second line. Instead of ending in the thicket, section II shifts to hybrid music-cyborg metaphor, tracking a clumsy “short circuit” return. Though tempting to call the poem a rebirth narrative, this is not the case. “The Hangover” is an experiment of temporal liminality, as time is not linear in this poem. After the systematic decay of the first section, the subject of section II is both “waddling forward” as they “stumble[s]/towards holidays passed/ a fixed March/onward” implying that forward motion does not necessitate forward progress in the calendar year. Moreover, “a fixed March” has triple meaning in this instance: the passing of time occurs at a consistent interval similar to that of a march tempo; while time may be moving in a non linear way in section II, the month of March is somehow held in place; and, the mechanical march/walk of the subject has been corrected such that they can continue onward in the work of the collection. The subject’s return from natural death as a zombie/cyborg captures the monstrosity of genderqueerness, a move meant to prepare the audience for the coming poems and to remind them of the collection’s core frameworks.

Now revived, though not quite the same, *E Minor* continues with “7:38 PM,” which was drafted at approximately that time, while sitting on the beach of the Spaarndammerdijk construction site. Workers had left for the evening, leaving half-finished projects vacant on the shore of the IJ, a brief ghost town of empty apartments framed by a thin line of beach. With the

knowledge that countless people will someday share entire lives in this place, this poem was written as an evening reflection on sitting alone in a stranger's future. Fashion, fine art, and culinary vocabulary color the figurative language of "7:38 PM," bringing to mind small luxuries shared in life, even though the setting is as mundane as a construction site. Small mentions of my transgender experience, such as the dual function of the word "binding" (expressing a freeze response to the terror of the previous line and a nod to chest binding to mediate body dysphoria) and the closing line's reference to deadnaming²³, are disguised in the narrative. The speaker expresses discomfort with their situation, finding that they identify with neither their current location, nor with their destination. Realizing that the temporary nature of their presence here is as insignificant as it is impermanent, the speaker rests in their "Etch-a-sketch personhood." Although the liminality of the construction site gives the speaker pause, they ultimately identify with their surroundings, learning to embrace the uneasiness of temporal and physical in between.

To continue with language play of ams and am nots— first appearing at the start of *E Minor* and resurfacing in small ways throughout— the last poem, "Monster's Lament," is as much the project's exit as it is a new threshold for the reader's own self evaluation. Each stanza of the poem handles a different monster in popular culture, such that the speaker defines themselves in terms of the monsters' characteristics that they do not embody. In doing so, the speaker jerks their audience between binaries of sorrow/joy, human/monster, and movement/pause. This type of shift first occurs between the title and first line, moving from the monster's (ie, speaker's) lament immediately into a statement of joy, "this is a joyful poem." The

²³ Deadnaming: intentionally or unintentionally using a transgender person's name assigned at birth (sometimes known as their assigned, birth, or legal name) instead of the correct name by which they wish to be referred.

stanzas that follow mimic this flipping scheme, beginning with a statement of difference, then transitioning to triumphant elaboration and self description. Maintaining the fear, intrigue, and eroticism of monstrosity, the speaker takes their joyous lament to craft themselves a new form. They develop a personalized monstrosity, transitioning from description to memory; in this way, they honor their past and their present together, reclaiming the qualities that first established their liminal personhood.

The brief analyses of *E Minor* offered here are merely that: an offering. The parameters of this paper simply do not allow for an explanation of every image and linguistic move, thus, I instead offer short insight into the intent of each poem, and leave the remaining interpretation subjective to each reader. The writing process caused me to accept feeling unmoored in discipline and praxis, and to lean into this discomfort, in order to engage with such personal themes. In doing so, this collection is meant to be a simultaneous place of rest and a starting line. For other transgender folks, it is a call to engage in similar evaluation of their space and situation, to share in my thoughts and to form their own, situated squarely between academia and art. For cisgender participants, the collection is a glimpse into my very unique experience, meant to initiate conversation, but not be the conversation itself. For me, *E Minor* is a catharsis made public, though it is a strenuous therapy. While a few poems will be shared aloud for exhibition, the collection is meant to be processed as a whole, from beginning to end. If the collection is a home, each poem is a room, and I invite you to take a walk through it with me.

I. Forty-Five Minutes

I walk into a supermarket on Tuesday at 3AM and enter an alternate reality
Where everything is vacant
Elsewhere, more a quality, than a place.
I stand between fog and Elsewhere
But to the rest, it's 2:30 in the afternoon on a Friday with things to do and places to be
Yet my molasses form and I remain,
A fixture—

An Understudy for my own existence,
Somehow a crime,
My human experience, a Misconduct for which I must atone
Yet they can't decide on discipline —

Numb and wholly Unpunishable.
How can one be forgiven
When they are dauntless enough to dare, venture into
Someone else's consciousness—
Claim to return unscathed
It's sacred.

To feel too horribly to forget all that happens
So I wait until the beautiful recedes—
Momentarily—

Long enough for a glimmer of humanity,
It spills out.

Monsoons. Cheeks with trails of regret,
Choking and leaking
 Unstoppable
That's why I don't—
 Keep behind closed doors.
Alleviate the opportunity for scrutiny.
To invite the other into the self—
 Unthinkable
I don't even know what I am so how are you supposed to find out
There is no observation without judgement—

Objectivity a myth.

Hurtling through space and time
Collapsing in on itself
And I have the audacity to think I
And my human experience
Is one for the record books

So as I stand in the freezer aisle at 3:45 Tuesday morning
Still contemplating plain and pepperoni pizza
Trying to remember if I exist amid the entire universe
Gazing, a spectator—
Stardust peppering my skin with new scars—casualties of insignificance
Freezer Burn victim
And my whole understanding of being explodes—
 Supernova—
 Remember.

To everyone else it's 3:15 on Friday afternoon and the kids need to be picked up from school.

II. Under my Collar

Popsicle drips into goosebumps,
A confection for one—
Not part of your secret menu.
Your tongue cannot curl
Around my edges, cannot
Form the syllables that
Create my name.

Tealights and black pepper
Spice your latte.
Cafe walls.
You request to expose my
Brick and sand my edges
So you are able to touch.
To lay your eyes
On my interior— and
Sell me to a buyer
Unknown.

Pen etching a script
You are simply
Not privy to—
There's a silence in
The pages— your radio
Drowns it out.
Keeping it tucked
In the folds of my collar.

A flash of cartoon
Amalgam of eraser shavings
Bitter coffees
Hair pomade— sticky fingers—
Making any attempt to
Be read as something
The world cannot explain.

A glitch in your matrix
Canary yellow pill
Opening door number three.
Inscribed in zeros and ones
The non-numerical solution
Wave particle duality,
Quantum progeny
The unreal solution—
The Null set
In your calculus.

III. Ode To My Dyke Hair

Hours until departure and
My grandmother, steeping in stale cigarette smoke and snickerdoodle cookies,
Only showing me the soles of her shoes and little tufts of grey curls
Pot belly half laughs-half chokes on her own blackened lungs while saying
 "Just promise me one thing. Promise me that you won't do anything crazy over there
 like cut your hair into one of those Dyke hair-do's.
 And what's your address over there I wanna send ya brownies"

Hours left until I leave but longer are her breathy pauses between words.
 I laugh it off.
Where do you think I got my pot belly laugh—
And in my wagging head I promise
That my shaggy excuse for a Look
Won't turn into anything more abhorrent than it already is
My "beacon of sin" body is of course, grammy, yours to patrol
All the way from Warminster, Pennsylvania
Where your life has been kept inside a fifteen mile radius
 Originally eight.

I leap into existence so far from that fifteen miles that it's pot belly laughable
I almost forget your cigarette perfume for a moment
While I marinate in myself as a Capital Q Queer
Only outside your fifteen miles
With an ocean between us for good measure.

I watch as the clippers glide along the comb—
Any part of myself that you used to see
Falls to the floor.
And I waltz.

 I tango.
 I salsa onto the street
Almost fall into the canal
Lighter than air
Head of "dyke hair"

Which is actually hilarious because one must be a girl to qualify
for that word and here I am

Some shape-shifting Frankenstein of other another's style
Cherry picked to piece together whatever I am.

Though I am simply a phase—
According to my mother, who smells instead of
Old Chanel with the round bottle,
Like lipstick and playing dress up —
I am a phase according to her.
I agree.

I challenge you
I dare you
I command you.

Show me a permanent state of self.

Dressed up for school picture day in
Dad's old shirts and thrifted sneakers and
Slicked up dyke hair—
I'm a forever of inbetweens and not quites.
Equal parts closet-corner dust bunnies
And anxiety flavored words.
I'm becoming.

My apologies do not exist.

I no longer match those beaming rapunzel-hair pictures on your wall
Instead of gazing at those god-awful senior photos
I want you to sit with your discomfort,
Chain smoking,
Lounging back so I only see the soles of your shoes and little tufts of grey curls—
As you sit and the version of me you knew slips
Sand through your memory—
Ask.

Is it more important to mourn the loss of your granddaughter,
Or to celebrate
The city and cosmos
With the dyke hair
Standing before you.

IV. Socialist Retail Therapy

A socialist walks out from the Metro,
Slowly spit, drooled, onto
Damp asphalt—
Knowing fully well that
Hellscape conditions produced
Their six-euro sweatpants
But sometimes daddy's gotta feel comfy
Wriggling between knuckles
Of a buy or be bought world

In the fluorescent lit storefront—
A hospital, though opposite of sterile—
Occupied by the socialist, the pants,
And god herself,
Need grabs the socialist
By the ankles.
To paper mache themselves in cheap labor
And flimsy receipts.
Pants turn bandage turn scab
In the weeks to come.

The socialist walks into a bar—
Too many rounds of negotiation between
Price and alcohol content,
Bartering for the same four euro beer
That has flavored every evening prior.
Two-thirds the price of sweatshop sweatpants
And they go down easy.

Cloaked in yellowed light to match
The beer, the wallpaper
Peeling, like a freshly healing scab—
Caught in the Indy 500 of mouth racing
And I'm just trying to cross the street.

V. People Watching

Do you understand why people wear vests?
Their arms left exposed.
Extremities chill first, yet
We leave them vulnerable?
Should I buy a vest?

Folks look at me—
Stare— but I stare first.
Everyone hurries
Faceless
Their homogenized individualism
Locked away from us,
A stitch too far.
Still I think
I should buy a vest.

A birthday party for one,
Reminder of being alive—
Sometimes others are too.
Lifelines thread between us
In our zipper tracks
Should I buy a vest today?

VI. Honesty

Writing in saltwater and saliva

A sneeze interrupting a yawn

Smoldering on hands and knees

The academy's illegitimate offspring

Feral

tsenoH

Conceptual
orthopedics

Assertion of life force

Lava cooling from the outside in

Misspelled in the spine of my memoir.

VII. The Hangover

Before the lungs care to notice,
I awoke with quaking bones.
Flesh flakes
Making its earthward dive

Skin mottled mud masses cracking
Acidic eviction from the
Brittle bone home.
Dragonfly wings pulse through
Deserved vessels
Churn up cerebral dust
Turn to cement in the dew.

A guest perches in the branches —
An apple tree audience for the decay.
Sweetly snacking on scarlet flesh,
To welcome
The newest member of the thicket.

II.

Skeletomuscular short circuit
Twitch—
Crick in the neck,
Iridescence-studded spasm
Goosebumped cadence
Waddling forward in bold ignorance.
Crashing up.

Psychosis still stumbles
Towards holidays passed
A fixed March,
Onward to the tempo change.

VIII. 7:38 PM

Sand castle ghost town
Fussed up with cement
Slow-lapping water robes,
Chilling the tide
Garnished in litter
Boundless chain-link ,
Disgruntled decoration,
Mummified in caution tape
Cloaked in seagull cries.

Headphones muffle a dissonance
The width of a bike lane,
Catwalk
To the slow-lapping water
Backed into jackhammer techno.

Intense seclusion
Seesaws fantasy
An Easter bunny construction
Terror in harmony
Binding
Leaving dirty sand pickled in dusk.

Stalled on an empty beach,
And I—Macerate in traffic
From someone else's memory.
Anarchy lining wool socks
Soaking in the lacquer of myself,
Traveling to a home
Where comfort is not mine.

Shredded polyester shudders
Footprints
Untraced
Etch-a-sketch personhood
As the water never bothered to learn my name.

IX. Monster's Lament

This is a joyful poem.

My time is not contained
In tears, ibuprofen
Or stale coffee
In glitching screens
Or stale bubblegum sutures
Grafting skin to my person

My palette no longer craves
Fresh flesh of the unsuspecting.
Only the soft delicacy of
Blueberry and Patience compote—
Perhaps a listening mind.

My tongue no longer remembers
Blood's metallic taste—
Saccharine fingerprints
Dusted off the neck,
Inscribing new language to savor

My soul is not dead
Your naked eye sees mine
Shadowed by unfinished business
Fully extant in form
We stare, exhausted—

My form does not regress
Your coat made
Of someone else's fur
I howl at at midnight
By ten I meet you— brunch,
Sipping mimosas.
I am not your taxidermy.

My remains come unwrapped
With dawn, Sarcophagus cracks
Clean dressings to shapeshift
Alarm set for time to breathe
Between compression

My fingers still remember
Tracing patterns I cannot
Tug at my corners.
Experimentation of their own accord,
Still stiffening around recycled comforts.

Analysis and Evaluation

While this is not the conventional format for transgender studies research, the poetry collection, *E Minor* is a thoughtful approach to evaluating the impact that liminal situations and liminal time periods have on transgender identity development. The greatest strength of the collection is its portrayal of the physical feeling of and emotional response to liminalities. Since it is meant to be shared with cisgender and transgender audiences, *E Minor* must articulate liminal experiences to both people who have similar backgrounds and those who do not. Both spoken word poems, “Forty-Five Minutes” and “Ode To My Dyke Hair,” are intended to be the most accessible works in the series. Most lines are prose-like to a large extent, an intentional move meant to mediate the anxiety that many face when introduced to poetry. These poems are written as if the speaker is conversing with their audience; the readers are welcomed into a story-like environment wherein they can be introduced to the heavier topics of liminality and navigating genderqueerness somewhat plainly. Two of the longest poems in *E Minor*, the pair of spoken word poems do the legwork of a typical academic introduction, while discussing themes fit for higher order thinking, often found at the start of a comprehensive analysis.

After appearing in spoken word close to the start of *E Minor*, the speaker then takes increasing poetic license, complicating metaphor and using figurative language in place of prose-like convention. “Honesty” is the most extreme installment of this technique, wherein it establishes— in under forty words— the speaker’s positionality as a person finding subdude, but honest strength, in liminality. Each cascading image builds on the erratic nature of the previous, so structureless glimpses of consciousness together create the threshold-like quality of liminality.

On the page, the poem is shaped into what it is meant to embody: a collage to which the speaker and the audience can return and revise. “Honesty” itself is a form of “conceptual orthopedics,” serving a purpose similar to an abstract, exemplifying liminality while also retaining (though abstract) the speaker’s intentions and findings.

Many pieces of the collection, whether full poems or smaller lines and stanzas, borrow language from cyborg and monster theory in order to create structures to which the liminality of transness can be articulated. By creating this linguistic commonplace, the liminality of transgender identity forms internal structures, “normals,” by which trends, observations, and experiences can be expressed in an accessible way. The result is dual functional: cisgender readers recognize familiar vocabulary, such that they may better understand trans voices, and trans folks have a common, relatable lexicon to discuss shared traumas and victories. *E Minor* ends with “Monster’s Lament” for this reason. After taking the audience through a rather intense journey into the compounding liminalities of transness, the collection closes on common ground. The liminal speaker meets a nonliminal audience in a set of metaphors, finding their sameness, “your naked eye sees mine,” and fundamental difference, “I am not your taxidermy.” In the same moments, a liminal speaker connects with an equally as liminal audience using “new language to savor,” as only they can identify with fingers “still stiffening around recycled comforts.” Building and actively participating in this language is a community strengthening exercise, an invaluable mission when mainstream conversation excludes— or sometimes never included, is would be the case for genderqueer folks speaking in Dutch— the majority of the trans community.

Monster and cyborg language calls upon not only the isolating otherness that the liminality of transess can cultivate, but it also effectively identifies the ways in which the cisgender majority fears, fetishizes, and is frustrated by their trans counterparts. “Under My Collar” is especially effective in this way, as the last stanza follows a stream of technological cyborg-like language that inverts the relationship between the speaker and audience. The speaker takes each image and warps it slightly, such as, “inscribed in zeros and ones/ the non-numerical solution,” to call upon something as familiar as binary code and then immediately depart from it; the basic code that gives life to a cyborg is disrupted by the cyborg themselves. This poem creates its own confusion and frustration for the reader, using cyborg language to other themselves, finding control and power in the language used to originally keep their liminality in place. Commanding the vocabulary used to establish trans liminality does not erase it. To use this vocabulary as done in *E Minor* is to reclaim these othering strategies as our own, and to share in creating our own trans liminal normal.

As strong as the collection is in creating and using the overlapping frameworks of liminality and monster/cyborg, *E Minor* is imperfect. There are a few poems, such as “Socialist Retail Therapy” and “People Watching” that describe their situation well, but fall short in gender studies analysis. Artistically, these poems make potent use of metaphor, and employ thoughtful combinations of figurative and literal language. However, the intent of the collection is to handle liminality and transgender studies together in analysis, and these poems do not discuss gender specifically enough to be considered effective in this way. Nonetheless, liminality and internal conflict are themes present throughout *E Minor*, so these two poems still cohere to the general tone of the project.

Looking forward, the work of this collection is far from over. Transgender identity is liminal in any geographical location, and liminalities can be identified almost anywhere. Although these brief months living in Amsterdam were the correct time and place to begin this autoethnographic experiment, my return home to life in Philadelphia does not render the project complete. I plan to continue the work of *E Minor* as a cathartic and academic endeavor, in order to continue tracking my own liminal identity as it is influenced by the varied liminalities around it. My immediate goal is to add a few more positive poems to the collection; while strained and pained narratives are inevitable in this work, especially for myself at this stage in my interpersonal relationships, this collection is not meant to become an archive of suffering. Much of my attention in drafting *E Minor* was spent balancing power and pain, and the future of this collection will continue in that way. There is also room in this thinking to expand beyond the bounds of autoethnography, and to do this work with other transgender people. Interviews and analysis of others' artistic work brings this project to a larger scale, incorporating the views of others living in liminality, exponentially increasing the extent to which my findings apply to the rest of my community.

Conclusion

Read my melody in earnest.
Tone stained walnut
Rounding off attacks,
Sound exists in the spaces too—
Remember them in your scales.

The performance is yours
Between breath marks,
I'll lay in my fermata.
Signing my key signature,
E minor.

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